



CONSEIL CANADIEN DE LA FOURRURE
FUR COUNCIL OF CANADA

FUR:

THE FABRIC OF **A NATION**



HISTORY

CONSERVATION & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The fur trade is unique among modern industries in supporting a remarkable range of cultures, traditional skills and lifestyles. It plays an important role in environmental conservation and habitat management. It also contributes to international business and provides income for people in many rural and remote regions of Canada.

PEOPLE & ANIMALS

More than 80,000 Canadians work in different sectors of the fur trade, which contributes \$800 million annually to the Canadian economy.

We use animals in many ways: for food, clothing, companionship, medical and scientific research, entertainment, and transport. At the same time, we have a responsibility to ensure the highest possible standards of care for the animals we use: this is why trapping is strictly regulated by provincial and territorial governments, and fur farms follow Codes of Recommended Practices developed by Agriculture Canada in cooperation with producers and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies.

Fur is a natural product that supports the livelihoods and cultures of people on the land—people with a direct interest in responsible conservation and preserving wildlife habitat. Many Canadian trappers, for example, work the same trapping areas used by their parents and grandparents. They are the first to sound the alarm when wilderness regions are threatened by pollution or poorly planned development projects.



The fur trade is one of the oldest arts we know. Furs were traded by the Phoenicians and other ancient Mediterranean civilizations. The search for fine skins (including sable) lay behind Russia's push eastwards, in the 17th century, beyond the Urals into Siberia and the Pacific regions. The fur trade was also the economic engine that drove adventurers to explore North America during the same period.

When Europeans first began settling in North America, the world was in the grip of a mini-ice age. Winters in Europe were long and cold—and furs were in great demand to produce warm and practical clothing. Teams of fur traders known as voyageurs travelled thousands of kilometres from Montreal on an often perilous journey that took them to the Great Lakes and beyond. They travelled deep into the interior of the continent to trade for furs with Aboriginal hunters. Aboriginal people also provided food and other supplies the traders needed. Then, as now, many areas unsuited to agricultural development were ideal habitat for beaver, muskrat and other animals that provide food as well as fur and other valuable products. Today, the fur trade is still important for the livelihoods of many Aboriginal and other people in Canada.

CONSERVATION & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

All furs used in the trade are abundant. Absolutely no endangered species are used.

In nature, each plant and animal species generally produces more offspring than the land can support to maturity. Like other species, we live by making use of part of this surplus that nature creates. We also have a responsibility to protect the wilderness areas that provide these valuable resources. The goal is to live on the "interest" nature produces each year without depleting our environmental "capital". Modern conservationists define this as the "sustainable use" of renewable resources. Aboriginal people call it "the circle of life."

Worldwide, the fur industry is an excellent example of an industry based on sustainable use. Furs used by the trade are abundant. Absolutely no endangered species are used. In the Canadian fur trade, government wildlife officials and biologists ensure responsible use by establishing controlled seasons for hunting and trapping, as well as harvest quotas, licensing, and training courses for trappers. Strict government regulations ensure that these quotas and seasons are respected. Beaver and muskrat alone make up more than one-half of the wild furs used in the Canadian fur trade, and these species are as abundant as when Europeans first arrived in Canada. In many regions, raccoons, coyotes and foxes are more abundant than they have ever been.

Government wildlife officials set strict trapping seasons for each species. These seasons are adjusted to ensure that fur-bearing animals remain abundant.

In Canada, trappers must pass a mandatory course in which they learn new humane trapping methods and the principles of sustainable use established by wildlife officials and biologists. Trapping beaver, muskrat and other animals provides trappers with food and money for new equipment and supplies needed to maintain a land-based life. Meat not used for food is returned to the forest to help other animals survive the long winter. Nothing is wasted. Even without the fur trade, trapping would be necessary worldwide to help control wildlife over-population and the spread of disease or to protect farm land and natural habitat. If some animals must be culled, it makes ecological and ethical sense to make use of the fur, food and other products those animals provide.

Controls on the fur trade don't just stop at the Canadian border. Both the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), with 145 member countries, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN)—of which the Fur Institute of Canada and the International Fur Trade Federation are members—work to monitor and control trade in threatened or endangered species. They have demonstrated that we can conserve the world's natural resources and ensure sustainable use through international cooperation. A recent example of the fur trade's commitment to responsible practices is the new Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards. The Fur Institute of Canada's trap research and development program provided the scientific basis for these standards, which are now being adopted by all the major fur-producing nations and the European Union. Jointly funded by the Canadian Government and the International Fur Trade Federation, this important program ensures that animal welfare priorities are addressed in a practical way when

In addition, animals are taken for food, fur or wildlife management programs.

to fur, farmed mink provides fine oils for skin care, leather waterproofing, organic fertilizers and other products. Nothing is wasted.

FUR FARMING

Not all furs come from the wild. The first efforts to raise mink and fox on farms began in North America one hundred years ago. Today, about half the furs produced in Canada (and as much as 80 per cent worldwide) come from family farms. Most fox and mink used in the fur trade are raised on farms. These animals have been raised for decades, generation after generation, like other domestic livestock. Feed for farmed mink and fox is produced with leftovers from abattoirs, fish plants and other food-processing operations.



AUCTIONS

Whether produced in the wild or on farms, most furs will pass through one of a dozen major auction facilities around the world, making it easy to monitor the types and numbers of furs on the market. The main fur auctions in Canada are held in Toronto, North Bay and Vancouver. These auctions are usually controlled by trappers and fur farmers themselves. This assures that producers receive a fair price for their furs.

At several auctions each season, experienced buyers from around the world gather to carefully evaluate the colour and quality of each lot of furs before placing their bids. Their task is to predict which fur types will be desired by top designers and consumers in the coming season. They must gauge how market conditions, weather, and fashion trends will vary in different regions in order to determine the price they are prepared to pay. This competitive bidding system establishes fur prices for the year.

Furs can now be produced in an extraordinary range of colours and textures.

Once they leave the auction house, furs are sent to tanneries or fur "dressers" where the furs are treated, softened and preserved before being sent to the craftspeople who make coats, hats and other goods. Tanning is one of humankind's oldest crafts. Among Canadian Aboriginal people, one traditional way of softening pelts was to chew on them for hours. This method, though effective, was extremely time consuming. Over the generations, modern tanning and fur dressing techniques have been greatly improved by research, providing many beautiful new ways to use fur.

Furs are unlike machine-made textiles: once the season's fur supply is sold, there will be no more fur until the following year.

DRESSING

FACTS ABOUT FUR

MANUFACTURING AND DESIGN

Eighty per cent of Canadian fur garments are made in the Montreal fur district. Most of the others are produced in Toronto although many retail furriers still make some garments in their own workshops.

HOW A FUR COAT IS MADE

The furrier uses a special sewing machine which holds the fur pieces together between two metal disks. The needle runs through the skin and sews the actual thread on top of the skin without going through and catching the fur on the other side.

A completed coat may have up to 10,000 seams when finished.

1 Every coat starts out as a **design on paper**. From this pattern the exact number of skins required to make the coat is calculated.

2 The furrier **matches** the colour, hair length, texture and shine of each adjoining pelt. This alignment of skins is very important for the beauty of the garment.

3 Once skins have been matched they are **trimmed** to fit the pattern. If a pelt has any imperfections it will be fixed at this stage.

4 During the **"letting out"** process a pelt can be lengthened to any desired size. Individual skins are cut in half and each half is then cut into narrow diagonal strips that will be sewn into a longer and thinner shape retaining the colour and markings of the original pelt. Pelts can also be worked **"skin-on-skin"** (whole pelts joined together) or in other ways to produce different textures and special effects.

5 The pelts are then joined together to cover the pattern drawn out on a large sheet called a **blocking board**. At this stage the pieces are wetted, gently stretched and stapled down to fit the pattern and increase suppleness.

6 Once the garment is dry, the fur panels are removed from the blocking board. Excess fur is trimmed away and recycled. Fur scraps are saved and sewn together to make a different kind of coat.

7 In the **closing process**, the sleeves and collar are added to the main part of the coat and the garment is sent out to be cleaned. This is the first of two **cleanings** which remove all the loose hair and dust that may have accumulated on the fur.

It takes more than 40 hours of skilled work to make the average fur coat. That's more time than it takes to make a car today.

8 When the coat comes back from the cleaner, the **finishing stage** begins. Here the lining is inserted into the garment and the final tailoring touches are completed with the addition of shoulder pads, interfacing, pockets and hem. Once the lining, buttons, hooks and other accessories have been added, the coat goes back for a final cleaning.

9 The furrier then does a last **quality check** to ensure the garment is hanging properly, all seams are laying perfectly flat, and the matching of the pelts is perfect. The new fur is now ready to be sent to the retailer and to its final destination—the consumer.

More than 170 top international designers now use fur in their collections.

Designers are using fur in ways that traditional furriers could hardly have imagined—and that's just the beginning. In design schools around the world, students now have the opportunity to experiment with fur as part of their training to become professional designers. A part of our history and our culture—fur is still the fabric of a nation.

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